

THE LADY OF THE HEAVENS

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(Continued.)

CHAPTER VIII.

When Rachel and Nole reached the house, which they distant for the time, as they waited to make sure that Ishmael had really gone, it was to see the man himself riding away from his gate.

"See prepared," said Nole, "I think that he has been here before us to our poison into your father's ears."

"It proved to be, indeed, for on the stoop or veranda, they found Mr. Dove walking up and down, evidently much disturbed in mind.

"What is all this trouble, Rachel?" he asked. "What have you done to Mr. Smith?"

"For Mr. Dove in pursuance of the suggestion made by the man, had adopted that name for him which he considered less peculiar than Ishmael. He has been here much upset, declaring that you have used him cruelly, and that Nohah, threatened him with terrible things in the future, of which, of course, she can know nothing."

"Well, father, if you wish to hear," answered Rachel, "Mr. Ishmael, or Mr. Smith, as you call him, has been asking me to marry him, and when I refused, as of course I did, behaved very unpleasantly."

"Indeed, Rachel, I gathered from him that something of the sort had happened, only his story was that it was you, who behaved unpleasantly, speaking to him as though he were dirt. Now Rachel, of course, I do not want you to marry this person, in fact, I should like to see him, although I have seen a great change for the better in him lately—I mean spiritually, of course—and an earnestness in his manner."

"Up to this point Rachel endured the lecture in silence, but now she could bear no more.

"Honest man!" she exclaimed. "Father, are you deaf and blind, or only so good that you cannot see evil in others? Do you know that it was this 'honest man' who brought about the murder of all the people in the town that he might curry favor with the Zulus?"

"Mr. Dove started, and turning, asked: "Is that so, Nohah?"

"It is so, Teacher," answered Nole, "although I have never spoken of it to you. Afterwards I will tell you the story, if you wish."

"And do you know," went on Rachel, "why he will never tell you his story among the hills yonder? Well, I will tell you. It is because this 'honest man' has been so much afraid of him, keeps his Kafir wives and children there?"

"Rachel!" replied her father, in much distress. "I will never believe it, you are only repeating native scandal. Why, he has often spoken to me with horror of such things."

"I daresay he has," father. Well, now, I ask you to judge for yourself. Take a guide and start two hours before daybreak to-morrow morning to visit that kraal, and see what I say is not true."

"I will, indeed," exclaimed Mr. Dove, who was now thoroughly aroused, for it was conduct of this sort that had caused his bitter quarrel with the first settlers in Natal. He could not believe the story, Rachel. I really cannot; but I promise you that if I should find cause to do so, the man shall never look in my house again."

"Then I think that I am rid of him," said Rachel, with a sigh of relief, "only be careful, dear, that he does not see you. He is a very cunning man, and he will be found out. Then she left the stoop, and went to tell her mother all that had happened."

When she had heard the story, Mrs. Dove, who detested Ishmael as much as her daughter did, tried to persuade her husband not to visit his kraal, saying that it would only lead to trouble, and that under the circumstances, it would be easy to forbid him the house upon other grounds. But Mr. Dove, obstinate as usual, refused to listen to her, saying that he would not judge the man without evidence, and that of the natives could not be relied on. Also, if the tale were true, it was his duty, as his spiritual adviser, to remonstrate with him.

So his poor wife gave up arguing, as she always did, and long before dawn on the following morning, Mr. Dove, accompanied by two guides, departed upon his errand.

After he had ridden some twelve miles across the plain which lay behind Ramah, just at daybreak, he reached a pass or nek between two swelling hills, beyond which the guides said lay the kraal that was called Ramah. Presently he saw a small enclosure by walls and stone enclosures full of cattle. As they approached the kraal, from its main entrance issued four or five good-looking native women, one of whom accompanied by a boy, and all carrying hoes in their hands, for they were going out at sunrise to work in the meadow fields. When they saw Mr. Dove they stood still, staring at him. He called to them not to be afraid, and riding up, asked them who they were.

"We are of the number of the wives of Ithubesi the Lion," answered the spokeswoman, who held the little boy by the hand.

"Do you mean the Umlungu (that is, the white man), Ishmael?" he asked again.

"Whom else should we mean?" she answered. "I am his wife, now that he has put away old Mami, and this is his son. If the light were stronger you would see that he is almost white." She added with pride, "Mr. Dove knows not what to answer; the intelligence overwhelmed him, and he sat silent on his horse. The wives of Ishmael prepared to pass on to the meadow fields, then stopped, and began to whisper together. At length the mother of the boy turned and addressed him, while the others crowded behind her to listen.

"We desire to ask you a question, Teacher," she said, somewhat shyly, for evidently they knew well enough who he was. "Do you mean that we are to have a new sister?"

"A new sister! What do you mean?" asked Mr. Dove.

(To be Continued.)

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